

## **Dr. Dave Mathewson, Hermeneutics, Lecture 9, Historical Criticism**

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We've been looking at hermeneutics now, or beginning to look at it, from the standpoint of the three aspects of communication, the author and the text, and then the reader. Beginning with author and historical-centered approaches, we look at meaning as residing primarily behind the text, or the focus of interpretation, I guess a better way to put it would be the focus of interpretation is looking behind the text, that is, at the author, the historical circumstances that produce the text. In introducing historical criticism, and by the way, remember that criticism, we're using criticism not in terms of destructive, judgmental, in a negative sense, but instead, more positively, criticism as opposed to being gullible criticism in terms of providing sound reasoning, sound justification for one's beliefs.

When we look at historical criticism, the last session we considered the fact that historical criticism developed as a specific way of interpreting the biblical text in contrast to more theological, tradition-oriented approaches to interpreting the Bible. Historical approach simply looked at the Bible as part of a historically conditioned text, in a sense. And we saw that at least three principles or assumptions underlies the historical, critical approach to interpreting the Bible.

Number one, we saw the priority of human reasoning, the ability of human reasoning and common sense in examining biblical texts in their historical context, cause and effect, the fact that the historical, critical approach proceeded from the assumption that historical events and historical documents have to be understood in the context of a closed continuum of cause and effect. And then finally, the principle or the assumption of analogy, that history repeats itself, that that which happened historically to be accepted as true must have an analogy to what we experience in the modern day. And so, examination of Old Testament and New Testament

documents under the historical, critical method proceeded from these above assumptions.

So, again, one of the offshoots of this is, therefore, there is no supernatural, there's no room for unique events, there are not things like resurrections and crossing seas and raising dead people and things like that. Instead, those must have explanations that are consistent with these principles operating with historical criticism. However, I would suggest, though, that when bracketed from these negative and anti-supernatural assumptions, historical approaches to the Old and New Testament are valid and have played an important role in biblical interpretation.

And, in fact, if you go back to our understanding of the character of the Bible and our understanding of inspiration, in some sense, historical-critical approaches to the Old and New Testament are indeed necessary. Because we saw that the Old and New Testament claimed to reveal, claimed to witness to and be a revelation of God's redemptive acts in history. And since the Bible claims to record God's activities in history and his relationship with his people in history in certain times and places, therefore, it's necessary to understand the Old and New Testament within its original historical context.

However, it's also important to recognize, along with that, that although they are not less than historical documents, the Old and New Testament texts are more than just historical documents. They are both historical and theological. So, I'm rejecting the history-theology dichotomy that goes back to some of the dualism found in Kant, for example.

The Old and New Testament documents are more than just records of historical acts, but are-is religious literature, is literature that continues to evoke a response of faith. But a faith that is rooted in history and can be defended and demonstrated. It's a

faith not contrary to history or at odds with history, but instead faith that is not against history or historical reasoning, but a faith that is rooted in that and consistent with that.

So, I'm advocating an approach that places the New and Old Testament documents in their historical environment and in their historical context and uses the methods of historical inquiry, but does not stop there and is more than that. They're documents that claim to be theological documents. They're documents that claim to attest to the mighty acts of God in history and continue to function as the revelation of God's will to his people.

Now, when we think about the historical approach in relationship to the Old and the New Testament, it might be helpful to divide the historical approaches to Old and New Testament documents into two parts. That is, examining the history of the text and also, secondly, examining the history in the text. So, examining the history of the text would ask questions related to the production of the text.

That is, the author and what we can know about the readers and the historical circumstances that produce the text. The history in the text would refer to specific references within the text to historical persons or events or cultural references or customs or things like that that need to be examined. So, for example, let's look at the history in the Old Testament very briefly.

But again, I have to confess that most of my examples, and especially ones that I spend the most time on, will come from the New Testament since that's my primary area of interest in research and writing and teaching. But again, I do want to illustrate with the Old Testament examples as well. So, looking at the history of the text, we ask questions, some of the traditional questions that we often find treated in the introduction and commentaries or Biblical introductions and surveys related to

what's the historical setting of a New or Old Testament book, who is the author, who are the readers, what problems are they encountering, what environment do they find themselves in, all of that with the hopes of placing the document within its historical context and understanding how it grows out of that and addresses that.

So, for example, if one is considering the book of Isaiah, one wants to ask questions about the author and who the author was and his situation. One wants to ask the question of the situation of the Israelites as they found themselves facing exile because of idolatry, because of their sinfulness, facing a situation where they may be carted off to a foreign country as a punishment for their refusal to keep the covenant that God had made with them, their refusal to keep the law, and to understand how the book of Isaiah, for example, is a response to that situation. Or, again, looking at the history in the text.

We said examining the history in the text is to look at a Biblical text and to note specific references to historical persons, historical places, historical examples, or historical events, references to certain cultural values, or, again, references to certain historical personages or places that may have an impact, or the author assumes are going to be known in order to understand the text. For example, this is particularly in the Old Testament prominent in narrative literature where you frequently find references to individuals and historical events and customs and values or places. One cannot read through the book of Ruth, for example, and try to understand it without coming to grips with some of the unique history in the text, references to historical or cultural events and values and things like that.

For example, and again, my intention here is not to give a detailed explanation for all of this, but simply to raise issues and questions. For example, how is one to understand the reference in chapter 3 and verse 4 of Ruth uncovering Boaz's feet?

What is meant by that idiom, to uncover one's feet? Some think that has sexual connotations. Others do not.

But certainly to understand the text, one has to understand what is meant by that reference. Or what is a kinsman redeemer, to use a common English translation of a term found throughout Ruth chapter 4? What is a kinsman redeemer? What is the significance of that? What role does one play in the history and culture of the Israelite people? And how does that shed light on our interpretation of Ruth chapter 4? And again, we could give examples, numerous examples from other Old Testament texts, especially narrative, that again refer to historical persons or events or places. Even geographical references can sometimes be included.

Or references to cultural values or ways of doing things that again may be very foreign to us or very different from us, but which we need to consider in order to place the text within its historical context. To give a couple of examples from the New Testament. One interesting text, when we consider the history of the text.

That is when we start asking questions about authorship and historical background and who the readers were. What the situation was that gave rise to a text. The book of Colossians in the New Testament throws up a number of intriguing examples.

For instance, Colossians is one of the books where the authorship of the book is indeed questioned. And while I don't want to spend a lot of time on the issue of pseudonymity, that is writing in someone else's name. Some who approach the New Testament documents from a historical, critical perspective would suggest that pseudonymity was a valid phenomenon in a biblical text.

That is, pseudonymity was simply a common approach to writing in the first century. And that biblical authors may even choose to follow that approach. So that some

have argued that Colossians was not written by Paul himself, but perhaps a later disciple of Paul.

Who is simply passing on the Pauline tradition. Who is writing perhaps what Paul would have written if he would have been present. And therefore writing in Paul's name.

However, others have, I think, mounted a convincing case that Paul indeed was the author. That there's nothing in the book of Colossians, however different some of it may be from Paul's other books. There's really nothing in the book of Colossians that Paul could not have written.

And so most evangelical scholars would accept the attribution of authorship within Colossians that indeed Paul is the author. More difficult to determine is the background or situation or crisis that precipitated the writing of the book of Colossians by Paul. Who were the readers and what circumstances surrounded them? We know a little bit about the city of Colossae and its situatedness in the Lycus Valley.

In the western part of Asia Minor or modern day Turkey. One of the things we know about the city is it was one of the least significant cities that Paul probably wrote a letter to. We also know that Paul apparently did not establish the church in Colossae himself.

But this is one of the rare examples of Paul writing to a church that he did not have a direct knowledge of. As far as actually establishing the church in the city. But more difficult is to determine why is Paul writing a letter to the city? What difficulty or what situation prompted him to do so? Recognizing that most letters were not simply written out of thin air.

But were what scholars often call occasional. We'll talk more about this when we look at genre criticism and the literary genre of an epistle. Most letters were what are called occasional.

That is they were produced in response to very specific occasions or very specific circumstances. So in understanding a letter like Colossae. Not only do we have to understand something about the author and maybe a little bit about the city and the region.

But we also need to understand who are the readers and what most likely what was the situation or problem or issue. That caused Paul to sit down and write this letter. And with Colossians there's quite a bit of debate as to what that situation might have been.

And one of the main issues is like some of Paul's other letters like Galatians for example. And perhaps a couple of his other letters. And some of the other New Testament documents such as 2 Peter or Jude or again Paul's letter of 1 Timothy.

Which were all apparently written in response to some kind of a deviant or false teaching. That had either infiltrated or was beginning to infiltrate the church or was in danger of infiltrating the church. Should we include Colossians within that group of letters? Should we see Colossians as being a response to some type of a false teaching is the first question.

Some early on there were a handful of interpreters and New Testament interpreters. That thought that Colossians was not written in response to any specific crisis. There was not a specific false teaching that was behind Paul's letter to the Colossians.

That engendered the writing of the book. But instead Paul may be just addressing some general pressures and general circumstances that the Christians and Colossae faced. However it's more popular I think today among New Testament scholars and students of the New Testament.

To see that Colossians was indeed written in response to some type of a false teaching. And the reason that this is usually thought to be the case is based primarily on some of the things that Paul says in the second chapter of the book. For example in chapter 2 and verse 8 Paul says see to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy.

Which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of the world rather than on Christ. So this would seem to suggest that Paul is warning against the possibility that some will be or maybe some already have been led astray and deceived by this hollow and taken captive by this hollow and deceptive philosophy. But even more specifically when you get over into verse 16.

Starting in verse 16 of chapter 2 you find a section that many are convinced reveals a definite deviant or false teaching that Paul may be responding to. That he is concerned that some of his readers have already or perhaps may be tempted to give into. So starting in verse 16.

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to religious festival or new moon celebration or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things that are to come. The reality however is found in Christ.

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you from the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the



head from whom the whole body supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews grows as God causes it to grow.

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of the world. Why as though you still belong to it do you submit to its rules? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. These are all destined to perish with use.

Because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have the appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship. Their false humility and harsh treatment of the body.

But they lack value in restraining sensual indulgences. And the question that I would simply ask is does that sound to you like Paul is addressing a specific problem? Namely a specific teaching. Some kind of deviant teaching from the gospel that had been proclaimed to the Colossians.

That now he fears might supplant that or might begin to push that aside. At least as I read it I would conclude in the affirmative. That I think this text particularly reveals that Paul is responding to a specific problem.

Maybe it's not as dire a problem as for example in Galatians. Maybe it has not yet impacted a large group of people. Maybe the teaching is not even trying to evangelize or infiltrate the church.

But maybe it's very existence poses a threat or a temptation Paul suspects to some of the Colossians. I'm not sure. But as I read chapter 2 I would side with those New Testament students that think that Paul is responding to a rather specific false teaching.

The question that perhaps is even more difficult to answer is what is the nature of this teaching? What was this teaching that Paul was responding to? And what's interesting even today this question has not yet been settled. When you look at all the proposals one scholar at one period of time. It's probably more than that now.

But one New Testament scholar early on said that there were at least 40 some proposals for who these teachers were. That might suggest to us that we have no hope in determining the nature of the teaching. If no one else can agree.

But for example very early on some thought that Paul was responding to Gnosticism. However because Gnosticism did not become a full blown system of thinking in religion until the 2nd century. Many have abandoned that.

Or at the very least some would say Paul was responding to issues and beliefs that later on emerged and crystallized into full blown Gnosticism. Others have suggested other religious beliefs or movements like Stoicism was the main problem in teaching that Paul was addressing. Or other pagan religious beliefs.

But some have shied away from that because of some of the clear references. The clear Jewish references. Notice one of the verses I read in verse 16.

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink. Or with regard to religious festivals a new moon celebration or Sabbaths. Especially that reference to Sabbath.

And the fact that earlier on in chapter 2 Paul refers to circumcision. That would suggest that whatever this movement is it has some Jewish element in it. So some have actually come up with and one of the more common explanations for the teaching that lies behind Colossians.

Again when we are trying to reconstruct the historical situation behind the book. One of the most common proposals is that Paul is responding to some kind of syncretistic religious belief. That is this is a combination of Jewish elements along with other pagan religious beliefs.

Or folk religious beliefs perhaps. In addition to that the strong emphasis on Jesus Christ throughout this. For example the section where the author said this person has lost connection with the head.

Which is Jesus Christ from whom the whole body supported and held together grows. As God causes it to grow. So the other corollary is it is often suggested this Jewish slash pagan religious belief.

Or kind of a combination of syncretism of Jewish and Greco-Roman belief. Or folk religious beliefs are actually devaluing and denigrating the person of Jesus Christ. So that is why Paul emphasizes the sufficiency of Jesus Christ throughout this book.

So those are some of the proposals with the most common being a syncretism or combination between Jewish and Greco-Roman religious beliefs. Again in trying to reconstruct the historical background. The history behind the text of Colossians.

However another possible proposal that I would suggest. And one that I have actually seen catching on in a number of recent studies on the background of Colossians. Is that the Jewish references throughout this book.

The reference to circumcision back earlier in chapter 2. And now the Jewish references throughout this book. The references to the new moons and the sabbaths. And by the way interestingly that reference to the festivals new moons and sabbaths.

That three fold categorization or phrase is found in other Old Testament texts. So that especially the reference to the sabbath is a dead giveaway to the Jewish nature I think of this teaching. All of this suggests that probably this teaching is a Judaism of some type.

And there is no need I think to look outside of Judaism of the first century. As providing the background for this teaching that Paul is addressing. But it's important to realize that Judaism in the first century was quite diverse.

So that we don't need to think that the Judaism that Paul. The Jewish teaching that Paul is addressing in Colossians. Is necessarily of the exact same type as the Judaism that he's addressing in the book of Galatians.

In fact we see a number of features that seem to stand outside of that. Especially the reference to in verse 18. Don't let anyone who delights in false humility and worship of angels disqualify you from the prize.

Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen. Suggesting some kind of a visionary experience or some kind of a mystical experience. You don't find that kind of language in Galatians characterizing the Judaism that Paul is addressing.

But the first thing to recognize is that Judaism was diverse. So that we don't necessarily need to see Paul addressing the same kind of Judaism here. As he may have been in Galatians or Romans or even in Philippians chapter 3. Where he addresses Judaism as well.

Instead is it possible that Paul is addressing a Judaism that might fit with a more apocalyptic type of Judaism. For example that is the type of Judaism that produced apocalypses. Books similar to Daniel and Revelation.

We have a whole host of apocalypses available. We have English translations of those. Apocalypses outside of the Old and New Testament.

That basically record a visionary experience of someone. And often that visionary experience included strict observance of the Old Testament law. Avoiding for example certain food.

Fasting in preparation for the visionary experience. As I've already mentioned in verse 16. This mention of new festivals, new moons and Sabbaths.

Occurs throughout the Old Testament several times. So there's really no need to look outside of Judaism. Perhaps a mystical or apocalyptic type of Judaism.

That would account for the reference in verse 18 of worship of angels. A particular type of Judaism often labeled Merkabah Judaism. Is known for visionary experience where the visionary ascends through heavens.

And often the goal is to get to the final heaven. And often there are angelic beings in the different heavens. And the goal is to worship with the angels.

Or often angels sometimes may be the objects of worship. But is it possible that this type of Judaism accounts for the teaching that Paul is addressing. Or even to be more specific.

That phrase new moons, festivals and Sabbaths. Is also found a couple of times in the Dead Sea Scrolls. And furthermore interestingly.

Verse 16. Most people assume that this is probably referring to Old Testament prohibitions about food and drink. Although it's very difficult to find specific prohibitions against drink.

However what is interesting in the Dead Sea Scrolls. When one wanted to become a member. One was often required to abstain from certain food and drink.

As they underwent a period of judgment. They were judged according to. The reference to being judged according to food and drink.

May reflect something like that. That initiates into the Qumran community. Which we talked about earlier.

Often underwent a period of judgment. Where they had to abstain from food and drink. Only when they passed that period.

Were they allowed to participate in the food and drink. Furthermore it's interesting we have a number of texts. That may account for what we find in verse 18.

Don't let anyone who delights in false humility. And the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person goes into detail about what they have seen.

We have a number of texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Called the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice. And what they were is.

They were accounts of worship that would take place on successive Sabbaths. And what is interesting is in a couple of them. There are rather detailed descriptions of the heavenly temple.

And it appears that one of the goals of reading these texts. Was that the congregation the community. Would almost undergo a mystical experience of joining the angels.

In worshiping God in his heavenly throne room. Another interesting text is one that is called 4Q491. And the 4Q basically means the fourth cave.

You remember the story of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Found in various caves and the caves were numbered. In cave number 4 in the 491.

Is just the number of the document to distinguish it from others. In one of the documents called 4Q491. There is an account of a human being.

Apparently perhaps a priest. Who has ascended to heaven. And witnessed the heavenly realms.

An angel and now he comes back to earth. And boasts about what he has experienced. And what he has seen.

So whether the Dead Sea Scrolls. Lie behind what is going on in Colossians. Is impossible to say.

But is it possible that Paul has in mind a similar type of Judaism. That is found in apocalyptic types of Judaism. That produced apocalypses based on their visionary experiences to heaven.

Or Paul is addressing Judaism that is similar to. Or maybe an offshoot or identical to the Dead Sea community. The Qumran community.

That would account for what Paul is addressing. It is interesting too that asceticism. Some have said well notice the asceticism.

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. And they attribute that to some Gnostic or ascetic or Greco Roman type religion. But interestingly the Dead Sea Scroll.

The Qumran community. For them the Pharisees weren't even strict enough in their observance of the law. So that the attitude towards the law of certain Jewish groups.

Such as the Qumran community. Could be seen as highly ascetic. So is it possible that the false teaching.

The deviant teaching that Paul has in mind. Behind the book of Colossians that Paul is addressing. Is a Judaism perhaps an apocalyptic type oriented type of Judaism.

Or another mystical type of Judaism. Such as one finds in the Qumran community. And this by itself provides the background.

The historical context and background. For Paul's writing of Colossians. If this is the case too.

Most likely this false teaching did not devalue Christ. This false teaching that the Judaism unlike Galatians. That Judaism was not a messianic or claimed to be a Christian Judaism.

But instead the Christological emphasis throughout Colossians. Is Paul's own response. It's not his response to the false teaching.

It's Paul's own correction. In order to combat this Judaism. That emphasizes ascetic keeping of the law.

And visionary experience. And worship of angels. In response to that the correction is Paul's emphasis on the person of Jesus Christ.



Perhaps Paul saw this Judaism. This teaching as in danger of supplementing. And supplanting.

Even supplanting Christ. Life in Christ. And Paul wants to demonstrate.

No this Judaism cannot provide. Cannot provide an alternative to life in Christ. The only way to overcome the indulgences.

The only way to restrain sensual indulgence. As chapter 2 ends. Is not by what this Judaism has to offer.

But only life in Christ. So then chapter 3 goes on. So since therefore you've been raised with Christ.

Set your hearts on things above. Seek the things above. Not the things on earth.

Is Paul's own response. Life in Christ is the only alternative. And the only response to what this Judaism is probably offering the readers of Colossians.

So again given all the variety of proposals. Absolute certainty most likely will evade us. But at the same time it's necessary to come up with some understanding.

Of what the teaching was that Paul may have been addressing in a book like Colossians. And how that affects the way that we read and understand the text. To give just a couple of examples.

From the second facet of historical criticism and historical approaches. That is the history in the text. That is examining historical and cultural references within the text.

And that is those references often referred to shared understanding between the author and the readers. And we need to examine those and impact those. To understand how that might contribute to interpreting the biblical text.

Just to give a couple of very brief examples. From two sections of the New Testament that we've already referred to. One of them finds its significance in at least two places.

But also other places. But two in particular that we've touched on. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well.

And then the parable of the Good Samaritan. We've already mentioned that a failure to understand the background for this reference to a Samaritan. Can actually result in misunderstanding.

And that we have in at least the 20th and 21st century American culture. We have domesticated the Samaritan. So that I'm afraid that when we read the label Samaritan.

We may fail to grasp the biblical text as the author intended it. And as the original readers may have understood it in its historical context. It's important to recognize that when Israel was taken off into exile.

That the result was that some of the Israelites were actually allowed to remain in Samaria. Which was the capital of Israel at the time. You remember Israel and the nation of Israel.

The kingdom of Israel was divided into the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. And the northern kingdom having its capital Samaria. The southern kingdom Judah.

Its capital Jerusalem. Some of the Israelites were allowed to remain in Samaria. And the foreigners who took them into exile actually took over the city.

And interbred with the Israelites remaining there. The product being what was seen by most Jews as a half-breed. Or those that were not purely Jewish.

Furthermore not only that but there was a long history of conflict. Even beyond that event there was a history of conflict. Between most Jews and the Samaritans.

That resulted in a number of bad relationships. And no love being lost between Samaritans and other Jews. So that when Jesus sits down with a Samaritan woman.

Not only the fact that she was a woman but primarily a Samaritan. Would have been rather shocking. When the hero of the parable of the good Samaritan is a Samaritan.

This history going back to the days of the exile. And the history of conflict and bad relationships between other Jews and Samaritans. Would have informed the way that this parable would have been read.

It would have been shocking to have a Samaritan. Perhaps today the closest analogy might be a homosexual with AIDS. Being the hero of the parable and the story.

And historically that analogy will probably change. Another example is found in Luke chapter 11. Again the parable of the prodigal son.

We've already referred to this. But first of all a couple of historical references that might be overlooked. It's intriguing that the parable begins by the son asking for his share of the inheritance from the father.

A number of commentaries have suggested that given the historical background. This would have been tantamount to the son wishing his father were dead. Because it would have only been upon the death of the father that the son would have received the inheritance.

So this at the very least this would have been an extreme insult to the father. Who was probably a wealthy and respected individual within the community. A second interesting reference is the fact that the father runs out and greets the son.

That simply was not done in the first century. For a father to run perhaps. But especially to run out and greet a son who had insulted him in the way he had.

Was extremely undignified. And was extremely humiliating. To add to that as I've already mentioned when we discussed this parable before.

Perhaps we should not see this as taking place out in the middle of nowhere. On some ranch out in the nowhere where there were no neighbors around. And they were simply isolated from humanity or from a community.

Instead what if this is taking place within a typical rural village. A middle eastern rural village. So that everyone not only knew what the son did to the father.

And how the son treated the father. But now everyone is watching. Everyone knew the son was approaching and everyone is watching.

And sees the son, the father in an undignified humiliating manner run out to meet the son. All of a sudden this becomes a parable not just about the prodigal son. But about the humility of the father.

The undignified and humiliating depths to which the father would stoop to accept the son. Now one might read the parable and say well that doesn't happen. No father in their right mind would do this.

And that was probably true. But perhaps that's some of the shock value of the parable. Maybe a human father wouldn't do that.

But that's exactly what God did. So that the point of the parable is not only about the prodigal son. And his repentance and return to seek the father's forgiveness.

But it's also about the humility and the humiliation of God the father. Whenever he stoops down to receive someone who has insulted him. And treated him with indignity by sinfulness and by rejection.

And whenever someone returns. Someone who has insulted. Someone who has sinned against God the father.

Whenever they return for repentance. The father much like the human father in this parable. God the father humiliates himself.

And acts with indignity when he stoops down to accept someone back. Who comes to him in repentance. So often the historical critical approach to interpreting the New Testament and Old Testament text.

Often reveals insight that might be missed. At best will be missed. At worst might be misconstrued and misunderstood.

When we fail to grasp the historical background of the biblical text. Two final notes on the historical critical method. Although the next couple of sessions will continue to examine methodologies and criticisms.

That still come under the umbrella of historical approaches. And author centered approaches to the biblical text. Going behind the text.

But two other observations related to historical critical approaches. Number one. We've already said historical approaches to interpreting the Old and New Testament.

Are indeed necessary. Because God has acted in history to redeem his people. The Old and New Testament claim to witness to.

And to be revelations of. God's activity within history. God's historical acts of redemption on behalf of his people.

That ultimately climax in the human person of Jesus Christ. Who enters history to redeem his people. In the political and historical context of the world that God comes to redeem.

So therefore historical evaluation is indeed necessary to do justice ultimately to the biblical text. But my second observation is by way of qualification. One of the dangers is we need to be careful of not making our historical reconstruction the primary object of our interpretation.

We've seen that what is inspired is the biblical text itself. The text itself is the product of God speaking. The text itself is the word of God.

So the primary locus of my interpretive activity. My interpretation is the biblical text itself. Not the reconstructed historical background.

Having said that though as we've seen the historical background in the biblical documents assume and depend on knowledge of historical events. Historical

reconstruction of events and historical references is necessary for illuminating the biblical text. But as I understand it the interpreter is always walking in a sense of tightrope.

Between only interpreting the biblical text and finding in the text the primary. The text is the primary place of our interpretive activity. Yet at the same time not ignoring the historical background that helps illumine that.

But on the other hand the danger is that my interpretation will primarily be of my historical reconstruction in the background. So it's simply a call for a balance. That the biblical text itself is the primary focus of our interpretation.

It's the biblical text itself that is God's word to his people. And is the place of our interpretive activity. However at the same time because God's word is rooted in God's acts are rooted in history.

It is necessary to understand the historical context. To reconstruct the history of the text and the history in the text. To help illumine and help us to understand the meaning of the text that we interpret.

What I want to do then is just briefly introduce another method specifically actually a series of methods. That all fall within the broader umbrella of historical criticism. The three criticisms that I have in mind that we'll examine in the next couple of sessions.

Is source, form, and redaction criticism. Again these are part of the broader discipline of historical criticism. In that they all in some respect attempt to go behind the text.

And ask historical questions about the historical influences on the production of the text. Or they ask questions about the author. And the author's intention in writing the biblical text.

And these three also we're going to see develop. These three develop historically and logically. From source and form criticism.

Which both we'll see basically look at the sources or the oral forms that lie behind the Old New Testament. That basically end up making their way into the final form of the New Testament or Old Testament itself. Or again they all ask questions about the author.

And redaction criticism then goes a little bit further. And asks how has the author taken these sources or these individual forms. And woven them together into a biblical text.

How is the author responsible for bringing the sources and forms that lie behind the text into the final form of the text. So because of that source, form, and redaction criticism are part of the historical criticism more generally. Also it's important to say while all three of these are alive and well in Old and New Testament interpretation today.

They've generally taken a back seat to other newer and more modern methods of interpretation. So that in some textbooks on hermeneutics or discussing interpretation. These are often overlooked or given a very short treatment.

Because again they've basically been eclipsed by newer and more recent methods. Let me begin to introduce you to the first one that usually historically and logically takes place first. And that is source criticism.

Basically source criticism in both the Old and New Testament. Although it works out slightly differently in the Old and New Testament. As far as the books it covers and how it is utilized.



But source criticism in both the Old and New Testament is again basically an attempt to get behind the written text. Whether it's Genesis or 1st and 2nd Chronicles or Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Or one of Paul's letters for example perhaps.

It's an attempt to get behind the written text as we have it. To uncover particularly the written sources that the author may have utilized that lies behind the text. So the assumption is that biblical authors relied on written sources.

And these can be uncovered or reconstructed from the text itself. So in the heyday of source criticism but also today. You'll often find interest in discussing the so called written sources.

That the author may have, an Old Testament or New Testament author may have utilized. Sometimes reconstructing those sources. And perhaps at times even going further and asking where did that source come from? What community or situation does it reflect? What situation or issue did it originally address? What situation originally gave rise to it etc.

etc. But again on the whole source criticism is simply an attempt to go behind the written text. And ask the question of the sources that were used that may have influenced it.

Again we've already looked at two pieces of evidence from the Old New Testament. That would suggest that source criticism is indeed a valid enterprise. That the New Testament and Old Testament authors did rely at times on earlier sources.

However difficult or speculative it may be to reconstruct those sources. We saw in reference to 1st and 2nd Kings. A frequent reference to the author saying concluding his survey of the history of Israel's monarchy.

Who often say were these things not written in the annals of the king? Or something like that. So that the author seems to be relying on a source, a historical source. That he's drawn on for his own composition.

Or Luke chapter 1 and 1 through 4. Where Luke says that others have taken up or have written an account of the life of Christ. And in fact there are other eyewitnesses of the account of events surrounding the life of Christ. That Luke himself now has drawn upon to produce his own account.

So even Luke admits that he is relying on both oral and written sources related to the life of Christ. That he is incorporating into his own work. He doesn't tell us what those are or where those are.

When he refers to others who have drawn up an account or written an account of the life of Christ. Is he referring to one or more of the other gospels? Matthew or Mark or perhaps other possible accounts of the life of Christ. In any case Luke appears to be aware of those and now drawing on those in his own composition.

So therefore source criticism attempts to, based on text like that, attempts to reconstruct and ask what the written sources were that New and Old Testament authors utilized in producing their own composition. And in our next session we'll look at more detail at source criticism in the Old and New Testament. Kind of how it works and what the value might be in its contribution to hermeneutics.

And then also move on to the next stage of criticism that is form criticism. And also how that has influenced Old and New Testament interpretation.